

Message Text

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43

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CINCUSNAVEUR

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 06593

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, UK, EI

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: SITUATION WORSENS

SUMMARY: AS PROTESTANT WORKERS' CRIPPLING STRIKE ENTERS ITS FOURTEENTH DAY, NORTHERN IRELAND APPEARS TO BE NEARING ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL COLLAPSE. THERE IS GREAT SPECULATION IN BRITISH PRESS THAT HMG WILL FIND IT NECESSARY TO RETURN TO DIRECT RULE. LATEST WIRE SERVICE REPORTS INDICATE FAULKNER HAS RESIGNED. END SUMMARY.

1. ON MAY 27 BRITISH ARMY TOOK OVER SEVERAL KEY FUEL STORAGE AREAS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND SET UP DISTRIBUTION POINTS TO PERMIT MOVEMENT OF ESSENTIAL FUEL SUPPLIES PREVIOUSLY CONTROLLED BY STRIKERS UNDER DIRECTION OF ULSTER WORKERS COUNCIL. ARMY IS ALSO PREPARED TO TRY TO OPERATE NORTHERN IRELAND POWER SYSTEM. HOWEVER, UWC HAS ANNOUNCED A PROGRAM OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE TO ANY SUCH MOVE TO BREAK STRIKE. UWC HAS SAID THAT USE OF ARMY
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TO RUN POWER PLANTS WILL RESULT IN WITHDRAWAL OF OTHER

LABOR ESSENTIAL TO POWER DISTRIBUTION (E.G. POWER ENGINEERS). PRESS REPORTS THAT MEETINGS ARE BEING HELD TO DECIDE WHETHER TO CALL OUT WORKERS AT VITAL WATER PUMPING AND SEWAGE WORKS. UWC HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IN VIEW OF ARMY MOVES IT HAS RENOUNCED ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING ESSENTIAL SERVICES, INCLUDING BREAD AND MILK DELIVERIES. COMMENT: COMPETENT AS BRITISH ARMY IS, IT SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT 17,000-MAN BRITISH FORCE NOW IN ULSTER COULD POSSIBLY COPE WITH MANNING ALL ESSENTIAL CIVIL SERVICES IN PROVINCE.

2. ON POLITICAL FRONT, COALITION PARTIES OF NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE HAVE BEEN UNDER GREAT STRAIN. EXECUTIVE HAS BEEN POWERLESS TO DEAL WITH STRIKE SITUATION. FOR OBVIOUS REASONS EXECUTIVE PARTIES HAVE ALL WANTED FIRM ACTION BY HMG TO BREAK STRIKE AND REASSERT GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY. BUT BRITISH CIVIL AUTHORITIES RECOGNIZED LIMITED CAPABILITIES TO COPE WITH DISRUPTION ON PRESENT SCALE, AND WE UNDERSTAND BRITISH ARMY HAS REPEATEDLY RESISTED VERY STRONGLY SUGGESTIONS THAT COERCION SHOULD BE ATTEMPTED OR THAT IT WOULD SUCCEED IF IT WERE. RELATIVE INACTION BY BRITISH HAS THEREFORE CAUSED RENEWED SDLP THREATS TO RESIGN FROM EXECUTIVE. AT SAME TIME SOME OF FAULKNER'S BACKBENCH SUPPORTERS AT NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY ARE BEGINNING TO DESERT HIM. THOUGH BACKED UP BY BRITISH GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT, FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE LOOKS VERY UNCERTAIN AT THIS STAGE. THERE IS INCREASED SPECULATION IN BRITISH PRESS THAT IT IS ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME BEFORE HMG WILL FIND IT NECESSARY TO RETURN TO DIRECT RULE IN NORTHERN IRELAND. UWC SPOKESMEN HAVE INDICATED THAT SINCE SUCH ACTION WOULD EFFECTIVELY MEET UWC DEMANDS FOR COMPLETE RENUNCIATION OF SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENTS, STRIKE COULD THEN BE ENDED.

3. COMMENT: GIVEN LIMITED BRITISH CAPABILITIES TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH SITUATION ON GROUND IN NORTHERN IRELAND, WE ARE INCLINED TO THINK THAT, PAINFUL AS IT MIGHT BE, BRITISH IN END WILL DECIDE THAT RETURN TO DIRECT RULE IS ONLY FEASIBLE WAY TO END STRIKE AND AVOID

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FURTHER MAJOR SUFFERING OF NORTHERN IRELAND POPULATION. SITUATION IS UNCERTAIN, HOWEVER, AND ONE CANNOT ENTIRELY RULE OUT POSSIBILITY THAT SOME MORE PALATABLE WAY OUT OF PRESENT DIFFICULTY COULD BE FOUND, E.G. DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH ULSTER LOYALIST POLITICIANS, OR OTHER INTERMEDIARY.

4. LATEST WIRE SERVICE REPORTS INDICATE FAULKNER HAS

JUST RESIGNED AS NI CHIEF EXECUTIVE. IT IS STILL
UNCERTAIN WHETHER THIS WILL BE CONSIDERED A SUFFICIENT
VICTORY BY UWC OR WHETHER THEY WILL PRESS FOR CONCESSIONS
FROM BRITISH GOVERNMENT.

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